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ABSTRACT

Canada's Community-Based Language Training (CBLT) program was designed as a part-time, flexible language training response for non-confident, isolated immigrant women who required adult English-as-a-Second-Language (A/ESL) training to assist them in their daily lives. It addressed barriers to their participation in classes housed in educational institutions and was developed in conjunction with ethnocultural educational organizations that received funding to administer the program. Learners were involved in planning the program, identifying topics to cover and determining the frequency, duration, and hours of classes. Manitoba's CBLT program, a cooperative venture between the federal and provincial governments, was funded through the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) initiative. In 1996-97, LINC funding was radically reduced, which resulted in a review of Manitoba's entire A/ESL system. CBLT delivery by school division A/ESL instructors came to an abrupt end. The CBLT program was eventually divided into two streams: ESL for women with child care responsibilities and English for Seniors. Today, CBLT offers English for Seniors in conjunction with mainstream senior centers. The paper concludes by discussing how to implement and assess A/ESL efforts. (Adjunct ERIC clearinghouse for ESL literacy education.) (SM)

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Community-Based Language Training for Immigrant Women and Seniors in Manitoba

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ED 476 120

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Background

The role of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), formerly Employment and Immigration Canada, has undergone substantial evolution not only in name but also in the delivery of its second language training programs. Specific program support, amongst other, for acquiring at least one of Canada's official languages and successfully integrating immigrants into Canadian society have been and still remain important federal policy objectives. Nonetheless, current CIC efforts are focused on establishing benchmarks and standards in direct response to the Federal Government's 1992 new Immigrant Language Training Policy (http://language.ca/about/history.htm) and to the inrush of approaches that have grown in scope and variety since the early 1970s (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996). This growth coincided with the graying of Canada's citizenry and steady influx of non-traditional immigrants into our country. Their impact is not new but noteworthy.

Evolving Diversity of the Audience

The first official non-discriminatory immigration policy stimulated a large influx of non-traditional immigrants into our country. The immigration "points system" adopted in Canada in 1967 eliminated selection on the basis of ethnic or racial origin (Taylor, 1987, p.18). The points system policy was in effect, an application of the principles and policies the Government of Canada wished to embody into new immigration legislation, as articulated in the 1966 White Paper (in Samuel and Jansson, 1988, pp.6-7). The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988, and the "multiculturalism within a bilingualism" policy before it, became an integral part of this new way of thinking. Prior to 1961, 95% of the immigrants to Canada came from Europe (87.7%) and the United States (7.3%) (White, 1990, Table 2). However, over the six year period 1981-1986, 7% of Canada's immigrant inflow came from the United States, 28.8% from Europe, 43% from Asia and India, and 21.3 % from Africa, the Caribbean and Bermuda, South and Central America and Oceania. By 1986 (White, 1990, Table 5), single origin populations other than British or French accounted for 45.1% of the immigrant intake. British and French immigration followed by 11.1% and 1.5 % respectively. Ten years later, in 1996, the Department of Canadian Heritage (2000, pp.4-5, 8), reported that single origin populations other than British, French, Canadian or Aboriginal accounted for 48% of the population, compared to the national 40% average. Elsewhere they state that there were some "5 million immigrants living in Canada, or about 17% of the total population." Of these, 11% were visible minorities. Metropolitan areas or urban centres were the largest benefactors. Compared to 62% of the general population, 89% of all immigrants and 94% of all visible minorities chose to live in the cities. These figures suggest that our cities are evolving into "EthniCities." The city of Toronto ranked highest in diversity with a reported 68% "others", and the city of Winnipeg ranked 6th with 59% of residents reporting ethnic origins "other" than British, French, Canadian or Aboriginal. The working age cohort (aged 15-64) tends to mirror this composition. Immigrant workers also tend to choose urban economies over rural ones. As Canada's cities continue to display increasingly higher levels of ethnic and racial diversity, so does our labour force. Women are part and parcel of this growing labour force. Statistics Canada indicators (http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Labour/labor43b.htm) show an experienced labour force 15 years and over, of 6,549,055 females in Canada and 254,400

females in Manitoba, or 46% of all classes of worker respectively, as per the 1996 Census *Nation* tables.

With respect to senior Canadians 65 years of age and over, they already numbered 3.7 million or about 12.3% of the total 1996 population (http://www.sppd.gc.ca/statspack/english/pop_density.html). Of these, some 20% were "immigrants or the children of immigrants," and 6% were visible minorities (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/pubs/communicating/audience_e.htm). Compared to 1.7% of Canada's working age cohort, close to 4.5% of all immigrant seniors had no official language competency. Ensuring access to second language training and acculturation to life in Canada were some of the expressed challenges facing this vulnerable population (National Advisory Council On Aging, 1999, p.13). At least 41% of the seniors, with origins other than British, French, Canadian or Aboriginal also lived in a major metropolitan area (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2000, p. 8). By the year 2011, it is estimated that this age group will increase to 5 million (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/pubs/nfa-cnv/nfaguide.htm) from 3.7 million in 1996. The 55 to 64-year cohort are behind these estimates. Population data from 1998 shows that there were 1,306,397 men compared to 1,345,486 women 55 to 64 years of age (http://www.sppd.gc.ca/statspack/english/age-gender_pop.html). The large number of seniors residing in the province of Manitoba adds cause for concern. Data show that after Saskatchewan, Manitobans 65 years of age and over outnumbered all other provinces and territories. As of 1996, 13.6% of Manitoba seniors were 65 years and older, compared to 12.3% for Canada (http://www.sppd.gc.ca/statspack/english/pop_density.html).

Demand for official language competencies among immigrants in Canada (http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/evidence/series3.htm) and Adult English as a Second Language (A/ESL) training among immigrant seniors and mothers related to settlement issues in Manitoba is large (http://www.edugov.mb.ca/inventory/section7.html). Thus and so, providing for their well being and unique social service needs continues to be an important expression of public concern and government intervention. Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship (CHC) actively supported these needs through a variety of programs, services, policies and legislation (http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/people_multiculture_white.html). In 1999, the Citizenship Division and its allied branches (Citizenship, Settlement and Labour Market Services; Immigrant Promotion and Recruitment; and Adult Language Training) were transferred to Manitoba Labour. These branches award cooperative agreements to local communities and delivery agents that assist immigrants with a myriad of programs and services. These are linked to job placement assistance, accreditation, employment preparation, English language programming for occupational, professional and academic preparation plus community based programs and A/ESL supporting settlement (http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/inventory/section7.html). The following sections describe one such experience involving non-citizen immigrant mothers and seniors with a focus on ESL related settlement issues in our community.

The Community-Based Language Training (CBLT) Program

The Community-Based Language Training (CBLT) Program was designed as a part-time, flexible language training response for non-confident, isolated immigrant women who required adult English as a Second Language (A/ESL) training, to assist them in their daily lives. Classes

were designed to address the barriers preventing non-confident immigrant women with childcare responsibilities, from attending A/ESL classes that were housed in educational institutions. CBLT classes were developed in conjunction with ethnocultural community organisations, at sites where the learners would feel comfortable. These community organisations were funded to administer the program. Staff were recruited and hired by these organisations, specifically to meet the program objectives. Funded staff included community co-ordinators called "counterparts", who knew both the language and customs of the newcomers. The community co-ordinators identified learners, through ethnocultural community contacts. They also organised other necessary supports, to facilitate attendance in the A/ESL classes. Supports for CBLT classes have included transportation, childminding and bilingual teacher aides.

One important aspect of community based adult education, was to involve the learners in the planning of the program. A/ESL learners recruited for the CBLT program not only identified the topics to be covered during their language classes, but also determined the frequency, duration and hours of their classes. They had a say in the program start and end dates and the teacher chosen for their group. Their feedback was gathered at the end of each term, through informal discussions between class participants and government staff. Special events and class visits provided additional meaningful opportunities to explore issues of class content and context as well as the actual use of English by program participants.

In Manitoba, the CBLT program was a co-operative venture of the federal and provincial governments involved in A/ESL. It was co-ordinated by provincial officials and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, through the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) initiative. LINC was also one of the funding mechanisms for institutional programs, including those at The Winnipeg School Division No. 1, Red River College, Language Training Centre, Applied Linguistics Centre, Victor Mager School in St. Vital School Division, as well as others. Some senior citizens were registered in each of these programs. The LINC program is intended for A/ESL learners who are at low levels of official language proficiency and who have acquired permanent resident status in Canada. Those who have become Canadian citizens and refugee claimants are not eligible for LINC funded programs. Neither are visitors, temporary workers, international students or the family members of any excluded group.

Some immigrant seniors, who met the CBLT and LINC program criteria, (i.e., low levels of English language skills, lacking confidence, responsible for child care and/or requiring other program supports such as transportation, bilingual teaching aides) became a significant part of the CBLT student group. Others were found in institutional programs. For example, one school division program was delivered at the Winnipeg Age & Opportunity Centre (A&O), a multidisciplinary service delivery provider for senior citizens. As learners take Canadian citizenship, they become ineligible to attend LINC funded A/ESL classes. The impact upon senior immigrants, in Manitoba was particularly significant. For some, the English class was their only social activity. Representations to eliminate the citizenship restriction for A/ESL classes were made to both federal and provincial officials, by ethnocultural, faith, women's and seniors' groups.

Over time, Manitoba CHC began to provide some funding as well as co-ordination, for inclusion of learners who had become citizens, into each of the A/ESL program streams; institutional, community based and workplace language training. Special initiatives within the A/ESL streams also received provincial funding. With this change, the two levels of government

worked co-operatively to make the delivery system more accessible and seamless for learners, teachers and community organisations involved. It also allowed access for CHC staff to obtain more comprehensive information on the learners who were attending A/ESL classes in Manitoba. All programs whether funded by the Manitoba or Canadian government, were asked to provide demographic information on all their students, using a common format. This allowed for further analysis of A/ESL class attendees by age, gender, prior educational level, language group and length of time individuals had been attending A/ESL.

Then in 1996-97, LINC funding was radically reduced. In Manitoba, this resulted in a review of the whole A/ESL system, to determine the best way to introduce these cuts. Among a wide range of changes, CBLT delivery by school division A/ESL instructors came to an abrupt end. This included the Winnipeg School Division No. 1 class delivered at A&O. This action motivated the A&O administration to approach the Manitoba government for replacement funds, to continue their one A/ESL class. Other impacts included administration and rental rate reductions for delivery sites. As a result of this cost-cutting exercise, the issue of seniors participating in the A/ESL classes was scrutinised, from a variety of perspectives. Questions were raised and feedback from prior classes helped focus the review. Is the topic, content and speed of language acquisition affected by seniors in classes? Do the reasons seniors attend A/ESL differ from those of other A/ESL learners? The results were a confirmed yes. The primary reason for seniors attending A/ESL was for social contact. Language acquisition was a distant second. Most seniors acknowledged that they used no English outside of class. Women in CBLT programs identified language for parenting as their primary reason for attending A/ESL. They needed to speak to teachers and doctors, neighbours and the parents of their children's friends. Socialisation with other moms of young children was not an initial motivator, but became a social support network. Other than seniors, most participants in institutional and workplace programs attended A/ESL to help them achieve academic or employment goals. In both CBLT and institutional programs, seniors first sought socialisation, then language acquisition, for use in the general community. Women in CBLT wanted language for parenting, labour market preparation and then socialisation. The final cost consideration was whether seniors are likely to make labour market and tax contributions. If not, is A/ESL relevant or appropriate for them? However, already a Health Canada project with the Canadian Ethnocultural Council identified a concern that immigrant seniors needed senior specific programs. They were necessary, if physical, psychological and social deterioration were to be prevented. The project identified the potential risks to non-English speaking people who were forced to use health and social services, as they aged, if they lacked the language of their service providers. The combination of the above factors resulted in renewed attempts by officials from Manitoba and Canada, to seek alternate mechanisms to address all these circumstances.

Evolution of the Winnipeg English for Seniors Program Model

During the 1996/97 fiscal year, a decision was made to explore separation of the CBLT program into two distinct streams: ESL for Women who had child care responsibilities and English for Seniors. The English for Seniors stream was to include individuals 55+ years of age, who were not labour market destined. Partnerships with organisations, mandated to serve seniors, were identified as a means to minimise costs for administration and space. They also provided the

potential for a benefit of delivering complementary services, which responded to senior citizen needs. Again, the search for more definitive answers found added support for separate senior programming in a 1992 Ethnic Newcomer Seniors in Winnipeg Needs Assessment Study conducted by the Department of Family Studies at the University of Manitoba, for A&O which had identified that A&O were not responding to the increasing population of immigrant seniors. Providing service to an increasingly diverse population was an area in which A&O had little or no experience or expertise. A&O had been anxious to continue their A/ESL class at their home site, their only program offering for immigrant seniors. Since A&O had been seeking funds to reinstate this class, they were a logical potential partnering organisation. Therefore, they were approached to become one project site from October 1997 to March 1998. Other organisations and locations included the Good Neighbours Seniors Centre and the Asper Centre, through the sponsorship of Jewish Child and Family Services. Ethnocultural organisations that had previously sponsored CBLT classes were invited to participate and support this project. They were contracted to recruit and hire community outreach co-ordinators and bilingual teacher aides for the project. A request to become part of the project promotional and support team, among their community members was accepted. Though considerable initial doubt existed among the various ethnocultural groups, that their seniors would participate, 81 seniors registered for the first classes in the 1997-1998 pilot project. On completion of this pilot, feedback gathered from teachers, other project staff, and the seniors themselves, was reviewed by the funders. Then, following a meeting of the partners and funders, further project modifications were made. Based upon recommendations of the ethnocultural organisations, A&O was requested to assume the administrative role for all additional aspects of the project, which was in the process of being modified to reflect recommendations from the feedback sessions. Further, ethnocultural groups agreed to continue to give their support through identification of appropriate project staff, promotion of the program within their communities, participation at special events and input at both the planning and evaluation stages. A subsequent, "re-tooled" project was introduced in late fall of 1998 through the spring of 1999 that ran to March 31, 1999.

In April, 1999, based upon a federal-provincial settlement agreement, signed in June 1998, Manitoba assumed full responsibility for the administration and funding of federal settlement services, including LINC program dollars. At that time, negotiations began with A&O, to make the English for Seniors Program stream an ongoing part of their activity plans, subject to funding stability. Funding would be dependent upon maintaining the CBLT program model and co-ordination. A&O would contribute enhancements, such as complementary and relevant programming at all sites and introduce a language partners volunteer component. Consequently, the English for Seniors stream included a project co-ordinator that hired A/ESL teachers needed for the program, and monitored a limited budget for student supports, such as transportation, childminding and/or bilingual teacher aides. Childminding support was made available on site, to facilitate student attendance. Transportation was provided to learners who had medical or physical problems or if it was necessary for them to take more than 2 buses to attend the nearest class. Transportation also was made available for low-income learners, who otherwise would be unable to attend classes. In this case, bus tickets were provided. A bilingual teacher aide was hired if learners had no spoken English, were illiterate in their first language and/or specifically requested such support.

The separation into two distinct CBLT categories was originally introduced on a pilot basis,

in an attempt to address the differing needs of immigrant seniors and stay at home mothers. Then, the two program funding streams became formalised through agreements signed between Manitoba and sponsoring organisations, in September 1999. Today, the "new" CBLT Seniors Program stream offers English for Seniors in conjunction with mainstream senior centres, in an attempt to encourage more senior newcomer participation and to create more awareness in the newcomers, of the programs and services available to them.

The Winnipeg Age and Opportunity Centre has become the primary partner in the ongoing English for Seniors Program. The English for Seniors Program Co-ordinator has become a full time permanent program manager, housed at the Age and Opportunity main office along with all the other program managers. The Asper Campus, through Jewish Child and Family Services, along with The Good Neighbours Seniors Centre have continued to be actively involved in supporting the English for Seniors Program Model by hosting classes and offering other complementary and relevant services for these learners. Ethnocultural organisations have committed themselves to continue to support this initiative, helping to select staff, who provide interpretation or translation services for seniors from their specific language group, during the recruitment and start up of each program season. They also are available from the beginning to the end of each program term, to provide assistance when and where communication or cultural problems occur.

The English for Seniors Program began with 81 participants in October 1997. By April 1999, it had evolved to 19 classes and over 300 seniors in attendance, with others on a wait list for fall programming. Classes resumed their A/ESL activities during a spring term April through June session according to the newly modified program model, others in the summer of 1999. A fall-winter term class was implemented again in October 1999. Presently, classes range from 2-3 hours, 2-3 times each week, are offered in a variety of sites, with morning, afternoon, evening, and weekend classes.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The composition of Canada's population and labour force is shifting to comprise a larger proportion of ethnocultural and racial minorities, immigrants, seniors and women. Their need for greater access and opportunity will present unique challenges to everyone. The marginal or disadvantaged among them have come to be viewed as priorities. Correspondingly, immigrant seniors and women have been much discussed. However, the importance of the radiation that these two forces will cause in our society is not yet fully understood. Difficulties associated with their integration and re-entry into the workforce may still be daunting (Statistics Canada, 2000, pp.196-201). For example, a 1999 federally funded survey recently revealed that immigrant women with professional credentials, were more negatively affected than their male counterparts by the "lack of services and resources in the areas of childcare and language training" (http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/Societal/stake_e.htm). Likewise, the adverse effect of accessibility gaps in language training on the social growth and development of immigrant seniors can be substantial. Benchmarking and standardization continue to motivate immigrant language training policy discussions today. Admirable and well intentioned they may be. Nonetheless, these can hardly be of significance if they do not move beyond mere standardization interests to include the changing demographic, linguistic, and cultural conditions and supports affecting our society at-

large. Accordingly, this was one of several service providing and client perspective hallmarks imported in our expressed pilot projects that parallel those gleaned from "A Workbook For Community Planning: Helping communities work together to help newcomers" document. Over seventy community organizations along with sector advisors (settlement services and language training included) assisted the CIC commissioned authors Gruno and Stovel (undated) to design this valuable resource. It was developed as part of the Settlement Renewal initiative of CIC which "...signalled that local communities should have a role in planning and setting priorities for settlement services." (p.1) Manitoba was one of the few provinces, which rose to assume the challenge available through settlement renewal

Additional experience suggests that A/ESL for integration will require more than part-time language programming. It will also require continuous audience analysis and segmentation, practice in using English with English speakers, and assessment of linguistic competence, pace of language acquisition, and motivational impacts on the newcomer. Senior Centres are places in which individuals with a wide range of backgrounds, experience, expertise and interests participate in diverse activities. Integration is a two-way street, with benefit for both newcomers and the Canadian born. Matching A/ESL newcomers with English speakers who have similar interests may provide opportunity to practice authentic and relevant English. It is also anticipated that new and mutually beneficial friendships may be generated. With complementary programming relevant to seniors, the CBLT program could be enhanced through the provision of a number of additional activities, services, and information for which A/ESL preparation could be offered in the English for Seniors classrooms. However, complementary senior services are not within the A/ESL funding mandate. Therefore, A&O and other senior centres continue to be appropriate and valuable partners to identify and deliver the complementary components. Each partner has already demonstrated some degree of responsibility for making meaningful contributions, as time, resources and ability permit. To inform the development of the evolving demonstrator pilot and enhance its functionality, evaluation activities took place continually throughout the lifecycle of the co-operative agreement. Incoming feedback, discussions with ethnocultural community co-ordinators, program managers and project staff suggests that the pilot was a helpful experience that facilitates newcomer integration in Manitoba and opens up new opportunities for them in the future. The opportunity to test their newly acquired language skills and build networks all at the same time are indicative. Yet, it is recognised that to strengthen evaluation efforts will also require various adjustments to project activities and routines. In the end, our success depends on remaining open to continuing food-for-thought and the resultant readjustment of program offerings. Evaluation will provide this continuing input.

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